/xi/ Foreword

114 The present work is part of a series of studies undertaken in French Sudan since 1931 by the Griaule Missions.

In the course of the sixth, seventh, and eighth expeditions (1946, 1948, 1949) the research dealt with the religious institutions of the Bambara. In this essay we have presented, with the necessary comments, the results of the inquiries conducted by the author, while taking into consideration the work of her teammates.

The information was gathered in the region of Bamako at Koulikoro, Kayo, and Kangaba; in the circle of Ségou at Konodimini, Banankoroni, Diammarabougou, Soroba, Massala, Toko, Shonola, Kokou Banankoro, Pelengena, Sama, Kala, Kalabougou, Ségoubougou, and Ségoukoura; and in the various quarters of the capital city, /Bamako/.

Some elements of the material described were gathered for the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire of Dakar.

115 The Bambara who collaborated regularly in the gathering of information are the following.

Dyodo Diallo, son of Zangué Diallo, notable of Ségou.
Mamadou Diara, director of the rural school of Bamako.
Bala Diara, of Banankoroni, farmer, hunter, diviner, chief of the Komo, chief of the Kworé.
Dji Diara, of Soroba, farmer, hunter, healer, chief of the Nama.
Bakonimba Koulibali, of Soroba, farmer, chief of the Komo.
Boï Koulibali, teacher at Konodimini.
Mousa Woulalé, of Pelengena, griot. /minstrel and herald/
Mousa Diara, of Sama, farmer.
Nadyè Dambèlè, of Konodimini, potter.

000 Numerous chiefs, notables, priests, and generally speaking, all those who were sources of interesting information were consulted. We thank them for their collaboration.

We also thank the Governor of the Sudan and the Administrators of the circles of Bamako, Ségou, and Mopti, /xii/ the Director of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire for the facilities they have provided us.

This study was conducted under the direction of Mr. Marcel Griaule whom we thank for his help in the field and for his advice concerning the presentation of the material. We also thank Mrs. de Ganay who has collected some of this material.

*173 These, in brief, are the difficulties encountered in dealing with sources for native historical tradition. When Islam introduced [25] a written language, there was created a new category of archivists, the marabouts. They have added this duty to many others; it cannot be proved that they have purged the job of its former vices, but it may be stated categorically that they have added a few new ones.

It is notorious that, in the Sudan, the Moslem traditionists have an ineradicable tendency to transpose everything into their own mentality. Further, since a manuscript gives a kind of quasi definitiveness to the oral tradition, including all its errors, it becomes almost impossible to eliminate these errors because of the unquestioning respect usually accorded a written document.

*173 There are also the non-literate Moslem traditionists: ordinary dyeli who have been converted in the usual Sudanese fashion, as described in Chapter 6, and who have abandoned none [177] of the characteristics of their caste. They have merely added a few peculiarities due to Moslem influence.

114 In drawing on these sources, European publications add new reasons for doubt. Most especially, because of a desire -- legitimate, in principle -- to bring some sort of order out of the incoherent mass of traditions, but also because of a need to make them fit a personal theory, the European author takes refuge in an hypothesis. Now there is no objection to this, assuming that the hypothesis on which the author bases his theories is clearly stated. Too often, however, the hypothesis is so well concealed or even so intricately entwined in the tradition that it is impossible either to discover what it is or to set an exact limit to its range. This new metamorphosis of tradition is not the least dangerous for historical truth.

115 *173 It is to two non-literate Moslem dyeli that I am indebted for the traditions concerning the Ségou and Kaarta clans. My interpreter, Souleïman Goundiamou (1), whose services as a

1. Now chief of the village of Ambidédi (Gadiaga).

guide and informant on native matters were invaluable to me, gave

115 me the benefit of his experience in translating these tales. I
*173 hereby thank him most sincerely.

As far as Ségou is concerned, Karé Tammoura's story does not seriously modify the known general outline, but all the same it differs from earlier publications in its essentially native feeling, which I have tried to preserve. It is very interesting, for instance, to see how step-by-step [26] an empire developed out of a fla-n-ton': this change in a strictly native form of association is most instructive. It shows in detail how one of these Sudanese empires -- and not the least of them -- was organized. It is essential to know this if one is to understand the political history of this country. Community, brotherhood, clan, slavery, Islam -- all essential and too-little-known factors of Sudanese society -- are there to be seen, alive and just as they are.

In spite of its weaknesses and its lacunae, I am therefore giving, without change, the story told by the dyeli Karé Tammoura. This Ségou Bambara has occasionally allowed himself to cover the truth with a Moslem veil, because he is a convert; but it is easy to discern the facts under the poorly applied make-up.

115 My informant for Kaarta was principally the dyeli Gran Koaté, who was also a native of Ségou and a Moslem. He was for a long time attached to the person of Ahmadou, son of Omar, with whom he resided at Ségou and at Nioro, where he acted as a close confidant and was sometimes charged with important missions.

124 I feel obliged to point out that these two informants are not entirely responsible for the lacunae in their stories. I had had these two learned men brought from Ségou to Djenné, where I was commandant of the circle in 1902. In spite of my desire to learn as much as possible from them, I had to consider the demands of my post, which left me little leisure, and also had to avoid keeping them too long away from their homes. Hence, I was forced to cut short their long speeches. I do not think that I missed anything essential, but undoubtedly there was much to be gleaned from what had to be sacrificed for lack of time. I hope that one of my more fortunate successors may be able to fill in the lacunae in the stories set down here.